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J Charles Krauthammer

## Spy Hysteria

Remember the Soviet brigade in Cuba? In the summer of 1979, President Carter submitted the SALT II treaty to the Senate for ratification. At which point Sen. Frank Church, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, discovered a Soviet brigade in Cuba. To meet the "crisis," Salt II hearings were postponed. The president was put on the defensive, the atmosphere was poisoned, the treaty was delayed and then sunk by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Then it turned out that the brigade had been there for 16 years. It was the nonissue of the decade. But it did its damage.

Every decade has its bogus Cuban brigade. Now we have ours: the embassy spy hysteria.

The greatest deliberative body in the world is again in an arms control mood, pushing for treaties—test ban, SDI, even a revived SALT II—from a weakened president. So, a weakened president, desperate to shore himself up politically and within sight of a Euromissile treaty, prepares to dispatch his secretary of state to Moscow for crucial arms control talks. And what happens? The Senate discovers that the Soviets have been spying on our embassy in Moscow and that our new embassy there is riddled with bugs. Shocked, it passes a resolution urging George Shultz to cancel his talks with the Soviets if they don't agree to a last-minute change of venue, something they plainly would not agree to.

The Soviets called the American reaction to the embassy story "spy hysteria." The Kremlin is not often right. This case is an exception. Hysteria it is. There is absolutely nothing new here. The Soviets have been building their hill-top, spy-nest Washington embassy for 10 years. Anyone who drives by can see the forest of antennas atop the buildings from which the Soviets can listen in on any conversation they please. And we have long known that our new Moscow embassy was bugged right down to the concrete foundation. Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan, for one, has been complaining about the embassy problems for years. Every administration since Nixon has ignored it. What happens? A couple of U.S. Marine

guards in Moscow are alleged to have betrayed their country and let in the Soviets in exchange for the favors of a KGB Mata Hari, and Washington goes bonkers.

"Whereas the Soviet Union has totally compromised the security of our embassy in Moscow . . ." intoned the Senate, 70-30. Not exactly. The Marines did the compromising. The Soviets merely walked through an open door. For that they are vilified.

"Sordid tricks," an "affront," an "assault on U.S. embassy security," complained The Wall Street Journal. A "rape of our national privacy," gasped William Safire. This country is "damned upset," claimed Secretary Shultz. The Soviets have trespassed "beyond the bounds of reason," agreed the president of the United States. And my favorite: Evans and Novak bravely called for "a full-scale exposure of Soviet [spy] practices whatever the impact on arms control." Since they generally view arms

control as an infection in need of a vaccine, they win the 1987 Br'er Rabbit ("Please please please don't fling me in dat briar patch") Award.

"The Soviets," complained Lawrence Eagleburger, "just go too far." Really? The FBI tried to tunnel into the basement of the Soviet consulate in San Francisco in the early '70s. I wish they had made it. If FBI counterintelligence is not trying to seduce, blackmail and "turn" Soviet agents in this country, it should have its appropriations rescinded. Espionage does not play by Miss Manners. No wonder the Soviets, who operate generally by conspiracy, believe that American naïveté must be feigned and there are darker reasons for the spy hysteria.

Even the shocked acknowledge, rather illogically, that the story is old. A decade old, admit Evans and Novak. The Wall Street Journal, allowing its indignation to be contradicted by its pride, boasted that it had run the bugged embassy story last October.

Yet Washington has reacted as if the Soviets had, say, taken over a small Central American country. (Bad example: Washington is fairly calm about that prospect. Say, as if the Soviets had

cheated at Olympic hockey.) The Senate, misled by a bevy of columnists, urges Shultz not to go to Moscow for arms control talks. Why? Because the embassy is not secure? But it has never been secure. To register a protest against Soviet "penetration" of our embassy (an unfortunate metaphor, given the circumstances)? But in fact we are just protesting their success at a game both of us play. I've even heard it said that our plans at Reykjavik were compromised. But until last week, at least, the conventional wisdom in Washington was that Reykjavik was a wreck precisely because we had no plans there.

To his credit, Shultz went to Moscow and made considerable progress. The hysteria will now shortly blow itself out. What will remain are questions not about American security but about American seriousness. If Congress pretends to making high national policy on such things as arms control, it had better stop these absurd about-faces. Just when negotiations are heating up, to suggest boycotting talks over an issue that would be utterly peripheral if it were not phony is a demonstration of high unseriousness. Good thing the Cuban brigade syndrome strikes only once a decade.